The A. F. of L. Weekly News Service gives news accounts and editorial interpretations of matters affecting labor—reporting in the industrial, legislative, and political fields, and contains other information of benefit to the trade union movement.

AMERICAN FEDERATION OF LABOR

WEEKLY NEWS SERVICE

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WE PLEDGE—
1 MILLION DOLLARS
IN
WAR SAVINGS BONDS
FOR VICTORY

WHOLE NO. 1667 WILLIAM GREEN, President WASHINGTON, D. C., TUESDAY, MARCH 23, 1943 GEORGE MEANY, Secretary-Treasurer VOL. 33, NO. 12

WLB Rejects AFL Wage Petition To Scrap 'Little Steel' Formula

Labor Will Continue Fight Against Pay Freeze And High Prices

Washington, D. C.—The National War Labor Board rejected by an 8 to 4 vote the petition submitted by its AFL members calling for relaxation of the Board's rigid ceilings on wages.

The AFL members, in the spirit of democracy, announced they would abide by the Board's decision but would keep up the fight against wage freezing and to check the dangerous rise in the cost of living.

Following the stormy meeting, WLB Chairman William H. Davis conceded at a press conference that the Board might have to reconsider its action if a "radical change" occurred in living costs.

Only on one count did the Board offer any encouragement to labor. It voted unanimously to make further studies on how wage increases beyond the limits of the "Little Steel" formula may be permitted to correct inequalities, to lift substandard wages and to aid in the better prosecution of the war.

The other four counts in the AFL petition were voted down by a combination of the public and industry representatives on the Board. The CIO members voted in support of the AFL petition. In the request for reopening the packinghouse and West Coast aircraft wage cases, Public Member Wayne L. Morse voted with the labor members, but the final decision was 7 to 5 against such action.

In their petition, the AFL members urged the WLB to scrap the "Little Steel" formula and to formulate a new wage policy "which is genuinely equitable, accurately realistic and administratively possible."

The petition emphasized that labor agreed to attempt to administer the "Little Steel" formula under protest and only with the understanding that this wage policy would be reconsidered if living costs did not stay put.

"Prices and the cost of living have not been stabilized," the AFL charged.

The petition pointed out that the "Little Steel" formula permitted a 15 per cent increase in wages over the Jan. 1, 1941, level to make up for the increase in the cost of living from that date to May, 1942. But even official statistics show that the cost of living has increased at least 6 per cent since May, 1942, the AFL protested.

"If no change is made, does the Board admit that in fact it no longer has a flexible wage policy but that wage freeze is in force?", the petition demanded.

"It is our considered judgment that the National War Labor Board should reconsider the fully demonstrated fact that the 15 per cent wage adjustment is no longer equitable and should therefore be scrapped. In its place there should be a cost of living adjustment which realistically reflects the actual cost of living to the worker today."

Charging that the WLB has neglected to take constructive action to correct wage inequalities and substandard wages, the AFL declared:

"Substandard wages make a farce of rationing when the worker cannot buy his fair share of goods."

Calling for a clear exposition of wage policy, the AFL petition said:

"The difficulties experienced by the National War Labor Board are due in the main to the attempt made to apply an inflexible formula to a flexible and changeable situation. As a result the Board has found itself immersed in contradiction and confusion."

The petition also insisted that the Board function in accordance with democratic processes if it permits outside influence or agencies to dictate its decisions.

STATE LABOR OFFICIALS SUPPORT 48-HOUR WEEK

Washington, D. C.—Resolutions reaffirming the 48-hour week as conducive to maximum output in war industries, with exceptions only in emergencies created by the urgency of the war effort, and calling for maintenance of peacetime standards of hours and working conditions in civilian industries were adopted at the conference on women in industry called by Secretary of Labor Perkins and attended by State Labor Department officials from 10 states and the District of Columbia and by representatives of the War and Navy Departments, War Manpower Commission, and other Federal agencies.

The resolutions committee consisting of John W. Gibson, Michigan labor commissioner, and William L. Connolly, director of the Rhode Island labor department, stressed the value of upholding such standards as the 8-hour day, 48-hour week, one day of rest in seven, the same wage rates for women as men, and proper safeguards for health and safety.

A Petition For Justice!

(The following is a summary of the petition submitted to the National War Labor Board by its AFL members and alternate members on the wage issue:)

We respectfully petition the National War Labor Board to act favorably upon these positive suggestions:

1. Increase the allowance for maladjustments or increase in the cost of living from 15 per cent to a new realistic figure based upon the actual cost of living to the worker.

2. Permit employers to apply the maladjustment principle thus modified without obtaining approval from the National War Labor Board.

3. Formulate and immediately put into effect a realistic wage policy which recognizes the existence of inequalities, substandard wages and the need to aid in the better prosecution of the war.

4. Immediately set a date for a re-hearing and a reconsideration of the Packinghouse and West Coast Airframe cases in the light of the new wage policy herein presented.

5. Guarantee that the right of the National War Labor Board to arrive at its own decisions on wage matters by the democratic process of majority rule shall be preserved without dictation by any person or Governmental agency.

(Signed) GEORGE MEANY,
MATTHEW WOLL,
MARTIN P. DURKIN,
LOUIS A. LOPEZ,
FRED HEWITT.

FACING *the* FACTS

With PHILIP PEARL

The other night we went marketing in our neighborhood stores in the nation's capital. It was, we regret to say, our first time out with the market basket in a year. Our purpose was to find out at first hand what there is to all this talk about high prices.

Our first call was at the butcher's. Well, a lot of other people apparently had the same idea. The place was jammed. And when it came our turn, the butcher with whom we have dealt for some years was sorry to inform us that he had no meat left.

So we went across the street to the fish market. The dealer had some fresh flounder. The price, he informed us, was forty cents a pound. It struck us suddenly that a year ago the top price quoted for flounder was twenty cents a pound.

Next door was the vegetable store. Here the prices were prominently displayed, so we looked around. Fresh peas were selling at twenty-five cents a pound, lettuce at eighteen cents a head, string beans at twenty-four cents a pound. Well, we thought, these prices are prohibitive because such vegetables are out of season. So we walked down the counter to the cabbage stand. And there we saw the sign—twelve cents a pound for a poor man's vegetable that normally sells for about four cents.

We went home with an empty market basket.

Facts vs. Statistics

And the thought struck us—how many wives of workers are forced to go home these days with empty market baskets? How many families with lower incomes than ours are unable to do without many necessities of life because they just haven't got the money to buy food at inflated prices? What's going to happen to the strength of our labor forces if they can't buy enough of the things they need to eat because prices are out of their reach? What is the effect going to be on the war production effort?

Then we noticed in the paper the announcement that the National War Labor Board had rejected the AFL petition to keep wages in line with living costs. It seems that a majority of the members of the board don't believe that the cost of living has gone up to such an extent as to require revision of the "Little Steel" formula.

It occurred to us that perhaps the public and employer members of the WLB who voted against the AFL petition ought to try a marketing expedition. Instead of relying on statistics prepared by others, they ought to put themselves in the housewife's place and see how much they can buy on a worker's pay.

And we also began thinking about these official statistics. Why aren't they in step with the facts? How is it that they show an average increase of only one-half of one per cent a month when food prices have actually gone up as much as 100 per cent in the past year?

Then we realized that these statistics include many other items besides food—such as clothing, furniture, etc.—items that the average worker's family doesn't buy more often than once a year, if that frequently. Most of the worker's weekly income goes for food. And food prices have zoomed into the stratosphere despite Government ceilings. In fact, the only ceiling we can discern for food prices is the sky.

The Call of Justice

Of course, the newspapers try to make it appear that higher wages are the only real threat of inflation. They warn about "silk shirt" eras and luxury spending by workers. They tell us that workers have an surplus funds left after paying rent, taxes, swollen prices for food and buying war bonds. On what? So far as we know, the average pay for factory workers in this country is still around $40 a week. If any expert can tell us how a family can live on that these days we would nominate him as Houdini's successor.

For it is a fact that American workers are now caught in a vise and tied hand and foot by rigid wage controls and unchecked price increases. The cost of living and wages have to be brought back into a reasonable relationship. Otherwise, there is going to be serious trouble on the home front in America.

American workers are willing and eager to undergo hardships to help speed the day of victory. They are ready to tighten their belts. They welcome rationing of scarce goods, so that everyone can have his fair share of what is available. They are cheerfully paying higher taxes than ever before in their lives because they know it takes money to win this war.

But no human being can be expected to work his head off and then find himself robbed of his earnings without protesting against being robbed by those who are making unconscionable profits out of this war.

We don't pretend to know who is responsible for high food prices. But the Government, which forbids higher wages, had better find out promptly and forbid increases in the cost of living with equal severity and effectiveness. This is only justice.

Union Mechanics On Guadalcanal Fought To Help "Keep 'Em Flying"

When the aircraft mechanics at Henderson Field on Guadalcanal Island said they would "keep 'em flying" they did not refer to American planes alone but also to Jap soldiers, according to Technical Sergeant James W. Hurlbut, Marine Corps combat correspondent who recently returned to the United States after a tour of duty with Marine Corps members.

"Frequently I saw those mechanics drop their wrenches and grab rifles and go to work killing Japs," the Sergeant said. "When they finished that task, they went back to working on motors and planes."

The combat correspondent said the mechanics would lend a hand to the Marines anytime it was needed and that they "did a good job of fighting and fixing."

Private Jesse Gunsalesal took a turn at fighting when they were needed," Sergeant Hurlbut said. "By everybody I mean just that—Marines, sailors, Coast Guardsmen, mechanics, Seabees, combat correspondents, aviators and anyone else who happened to be around. It was everybody's job and everybody worked together to win the fight."

News Briefs

AFL WORKERS PUT POWER BEHIND BULLETS, BOMBS

Muscle Shoals, Ga.—Ammonium nitrate manufactured by members of AFL unions employed by the Tennessee Valley Authority here, is the driving power behind the bullets, bombs and shells that are being fired at the Nazis and Japs in every theater of operations, Lieut. Eugene F. Boesch, assistant director of technical training at the Army Ordnance School, Aberdeen Proving Ground, Md., told TVA workers.

"Without ammunition and huge quantities of it—we couldn't fight at all," Lieut. Boesch asserted. "Ammonia means firepower, and the side with the greatest firepower is going to win."

Unionists at Muscle Shoals, where the government has harnessed tremendous amounts of electric power vitally needed in the war effort, manufacture ammonia and convert it into nitric acid, which is combined with other materials to produce smokeless powder, guncotton, cordite and other munitions. These workers also use ammonia and nitric acid to produce ammonium nitrate.

TRUMAN COMMITTEE PATS LABOR ON THE BACK

Washington, D. C.—The Senate Truman Committee investigating the war production program praised labor for its "excellent job" in the committee's latest report.

"The great labor organizations," the committee testified, "have done an excellent job. War material of almost every description is rolling off the production lines at rates which the committee is confident have not been and cannot be equaled by our enemies.

"This production has been achieved without sacrificing quality, and our armed forces today have the best equipment in the world."

OUTPUT OF WORKERS DOUBLED IN 40 YEARS

Washington, D. C.—A report issued here by the National Bureau of Economic Research reveals that in 1939 American factories turned out a volume of products, twice as large as in 1914, with a labor force only one-fifth greater.

As further evidence of the amazing increase in labor productivity, the report recalls that in the 40-year period 1899 to 1939, the number of factory jobs doubled, while the output of these factories increased fourfold. This decline in unit labor needs was held to be more remarkable in view of the fact that weekly hours of labor dropped from an average of 60 to about 40 hours.

KAISER CRITICIZES WORK-OR-FIGHT BILL

Washington, D. C.—Henry J. Kaiser, West Coast shipbuilder, believes that absenteeism in war industries can be corrected "by voluntary and free methods" without pass or proposed work-or-fight legislation.

"You can't find out whether legislation is needed or not until you determine the cause of the condition," he told the House Labor Committee.

"Labor is not always right, but it is improper to make accusations against labor—as has been done in connection with absenteeism—until you know the cause."

On absenteeism, he reported that in the Kaiser yards absences average between 6 and 8 per cent, due in part to transportation and housing difficulties.

"There always is a percentage of workers who fail to care, and must be stimulated," he conceded, adding, "But there must be fairness and justice on both sides. Management can be and often is at fault in cases of absenteeism."

BIG CHILD CARE PLAN LAUNCHED IN NEW YORK

Albany, N. Y.—A $15,000,000 program to provide care for the children of women working in war industries was approved by the State War Council, composed of representatives of government, labor and industry.

The program is to be financed one-third by the state, one-third by localities and one-third by parents. In the event that federal funds are made available, the state's share will be reduced by that amount. The cost of child care under the program is estimated at a maximum of $275 a year for each child between 3 and 5 years of age and $100 a year for school children over 5.

The centers will be open to all children whose mothers are working either in war industries or in war power shortage areas. Provision has also been made to take over 25 settlement houses, nurseries operated by the WPA, when or otherwise would have closed down April 1.

Green And F.D.R. Join In Opposing Compulsory 'Draft Labor' Law Now

The Answer To Absenteeism!

(Following is a brief talk on absenteeism delivered on a national radio hook-up by AFL President William Green:)

By WILLIAM GREEN,
President, American Federation of Labor

Labor is determined to take the "absence" out of absenteeism in order to promote the more effective prosecution of the war. To do this intelligently and effectively, we must first find out what causes absenteeism, where the responsibility lies and how remedies may be applied.

There are more than a hundred causes of absenteeism. Outstanding are illness and accidents, which account for 50 per cent of the total. Other major causes are bad housing, overcrowded transportation, fatigue, shortages of materials, improper planning of the work sequence, lack of effective supervision and waywardness of individual workers.

The community is primarily responsible for the reduction of illness. More attention must be given to proper nutrition, as food supplies grow scarcer. Adequate medical care should be provided. Disgraceful conditions of mass overcrowding in concentrated industrial areas should be eliminated.

Management must try to cut down the appalling number of industrial accidents which, during 1942, caused five times as many casualties among war workers as were suffered by American soldiers and sailors on the battlefront. The National Safety Council estimates that 90 million man-days of production were lost last year by accidents which could have been prevented by the installation of simple and inexpensive safety devices.

The Government must arrange to allocate tools and materials efficiently and to see to it that slip-shod managerial methods do not enforce idleness, absence and lowered production.

It is the responsibility of labor to take drastic action against any worker who is derelict in his duty by wilfully and needlessly staying away from his war job.

Now, we have established that the responsibility for absenteeism is shared by the community, by management, by labor and by the Government. The next step is to find some instrumentality through which all of these can share the responsibility and exert teamwork to reduce absenteeism.

Great Britain solved its absentee problem not by legislation but by assigning the job to labor-management committees. The same method has been tried in a few plants in this country and in every case the labor-management committee has succeeded in cutting absenteeism to the bone. I earnestly recommend that this plan be enlarged and extended to cover all war production industries.

McNutt Says Unions Do Good Job In Cutting Down Absenteeism Losses

Washington, D. C.—Labor groups of the United States have done "one of the most constructive jobs in dealing with absenteeism," Paul V. McNutt, War Manpower Commission chairman, declared.

McNutt said there had been a tendency to turn the problem of absenteeism into an attack upon labor unions. This is opposed by the War Manpower Commission, he said.

"There are a good many problems involved in absenteeism," McNutt said. "There is the question of vacations which is certainly worth studying. Military cadets recognize the need for releasing soldiers from tension. The whole matter of industrial vacations are needed as well. The merit and the need for such vacations could be decided by labor-management committees."

Labor unions are doing an excellent job in combating absenteeism in the plants, he said. Communities are beginning to study and take up the problems which they are best fitted to remedy.

"The problem is really a local problem and should be met as such," he said, adding that home front defense, recreation, and medical service should be extended to best fit working hours of the plants.

Other manpower developments reported by McNutt included the disclosure that the number of workers who are transferring from non-essential jobs to war work is at the rate of 1,000,000 per month.

He stated he had not changed his mind as to the value of voluntary programs for controlling manpower.

A War Production Hero

To get to his job on time, Lloyd Converse walked all night through a blizzard in up-state New York that left 12-foot snow drifts, and marched himself into the national limelight as a production front hero.

Converse, an OWR electrician, was the 42-year-old worker who had worked through his shift and then an additional 8-hour stretch to replace a broken transformer, a congressman's telegram on March 12. At his plant, the Massena branch of Aluminum Co. of America, the labor-management committee composed of representatives of an AFL Federal Union and of management decided to recommend him for national honors.

Mr. Nelson, after the report of Converse's feat was received in his office, hailed the hero as "War Production Drive Headquarters in Washington, wired Converse:

"I have just been informed of the fact that last Sunday night you walked 20 miles through a blizzard to get to your war job on time and that after working your own shift you worked an additional 8-hour shift for the workers absent because of the storm. I want to congratulate you and I know your determination to do your job every day will be a real inspiration to every American war worker."

The labor-management committee at his plant, said War Production Drive Headquarters, has been extremely active in promoting among workers of the plant determination to stay on the job.

Kentucky AFL and Governor Johnson Confer On Problems Facing Schools

Frankfort, Ky.—Representatives of the American Federation of Labor and the Kentucky State Federation of Labor conferred with Governor Keen Johnson regarding the critical problems facing the schools of Kentucky. Hundreds of Kentucky teachers whose salaries are below $800 per year are leaving the profession to seek living wages in war industries, Labor discussed various proposals for providing some relief to teachers salaries, in order to keep teachers from going to defense industries; it was proposed by officials of the state federation of labor that a committee representing various groups including labor, agriculture, industry, and the public at large be formed to outline a program of action in relation to the present emergency.

Governor Johnson stated that he hoped to leave the state treasury in such a condition that the coming legislature would be able to take emergency action to solve the serious crisis facing the schools. The governor also stated that he would take under advisement the desirability of appointing a citizens committee to study the whole problem.

Representatives of the Kentucky State Federation of Labor were: Alexander Jeffery, president; Edward Weyler, secretary-treasurer, and James Lowe, vice president. From the American Federation of Labor was Irvin B. Kimmell, secretary-treasurer of the American Federation of Teachers and a member of the national committee on education of the American Federation of Labor.

President Hopes To Avoid Such Drastic Action For Duration

Washington, D. C.—President Roosevelt joined with AFL President William Green in opposing any immediate legislation to draft labor for service in war industry.

At a White House press conference, the President declared it was a question of when, if ever, such legislation would be needed. It might be avoided all the way through the war, he said.

Mr. Green, appearing before the Senate Military Affairs Committee to testify on the Austin-Wadsworth compulsory labor conscription bill, declared:

"The American Federation of Labor must be and is unalterably opposed to this bill, and is unalterably opposed to any similar proposals that so directly undermine the most important props of our democracy. Let me make it as clear as I know how that the opposition of the American Federation of Labor has been reached only after the most careful and minute study of the provisions of this bill. The Federation has come to the conclusion that so drastic and unprecedented a measure is unnecessary."

President Roosevelt's statement was regarded as especially significant because it directly contradicted the testimony of War Department officials who told the Senate Military Affairs Committee they favored the Austin-Wadsworth bill.

However, the President's policy, announced two days after ... ...arly defined by Mr. Green in his testimony, as follows:

"To organized labor the present world conflict presents the most important challenge in its history. The issue is clear—free labor versus slave labor. We are determined to prove for ourselves and to the world that the capacity, the spirit and productivity of free labor is far and away superior to that of coerced labor. And I believe I can say, without fear of contradiction, that we have already accumulated an imposing array of proof—the most amazing record of production ever accomplished—in support of our conviction.

"If the issue be as I have stated it, is it not self-evident that this proposal must be defeated? Are we to say that free labor has lost its creative vitality? Are we to announce that slave labor can be defeated only by slave labor?

"I say to you that enactment of this bill into law would be grave mistake, both on the battle and production fronts, the very essence and meaning of this war. It would be a first step taken from them the enthusiastic zeal and spirit now so characteristic of their efforts.

"I take it that this proposal is predicated on the assumption that there is a dire necessity for compulsory labor in order effectively to prosecute the war. I categorically deny the truth of that assumption. It has not and cannot be established that the absence of compulsion of labor is a factor in retarding production. It is my firm and implicit conviction that such delays as there have been were prompted by conflicting governmental policies and not by any failure of any segment of our working population voluntarily to perform the jobs that have to be done.

"It is hardly arguable that the first indispensable to maximum production is a coordinated and coordinated program administered in a coordinated and consistent manner. The manpower problem must realistically be regarded and treated as an isolated problem. It is but a part or a function of all other phases of the war program, such as the extent of the armed services, the awarding and allocation of war contracts, the continuous and efficient flow of raw materials from the proper sources to the proper outlets, and the like. To compulsorily send an additional one thousand skilled workers to a plant that is already below its production levels because of a want of an essential raw material does not solve any problem; it clearly aggravates it."

Mr. Green urged the Senate Committee to permit the Government, labor and industry further opportunity to solve manpower problems on a voluntary, cooperative basis.

CONSTRUCTION PROJECTS GIVEN APPROVAL BY WPB

Washington, D. C.—Construction projects totaling $1,060,000,000, which were examined and found to be essential to the war effort, have been approved by the War Production Board in a little more than four months.

This period covers the time since October 22 when the Facility Clearance Board and the Facility Review Committee were organized to pass on the essentiality of construction and eliminate the unnecessary in order to save materials, manpower and other resources for war work.